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Media Representation of Asian Americans and Asian Native New Yorkers' Hybrid Persona

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**MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS
AND ASIAN NATIVE NEW YORKERS' HYBRID PERSONA**

by

MIN HUH

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York 2016

2016

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MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS
AND ASIAN NATIVE NEW YORKERS' HYBRID PERSONA

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS AND ASIAN NATIVE NEW YORKERS' HYBRID PERSONA

by

MIN HUH

ADVISOR: DAVID HALLE

Asian Americans, having been degraded in the realm of popular media and neglected in the consumer market, have been unable to obtain a voice or leave a trace in American pop culture. The meager representation that Asian Americans rarely have is highly controlled through a distorted lens, inclined to paint them in a grotesquely exaggerated light for comic relief. The absence of Asian Americans in the media has compelled the Asian American youth to adapt the personas of different cultures in their desires for social and cultural mobility. These factors have given birth to a hybrid persona among Asian Native New Yorkers (ANNY), the subject of analysis in my thesis. These hybrid personas are part of the initial problem of misrepresentation, however, they are also a product of it as well. This essay and video interview explore the different layers of the issue, while attempting to arrive at a solution that grants Asian Americans Independence in their own representation.

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Introduction

The research and analysis of this volume initially sprung from my observations of a new type of persona embodied by young Asian native New Yorkers (ANNYS). ANNYS specifically refers to American-born, second generation Asians¹ whose parents moved to New York City during the late 20th century. As an Asian menswear fashion designer, and an aspiring fashion scholar, who has lived in New York City for the past ten years, I have noticed the characteristics of this “new” persona by ANNYS, which I coin as “hip-hop/street persona.” First and foremost, I have encountered a number of ANNYS in their early to late 20’s, especially those who grew up in the Queens and Brooklyn boroughs. They assimilate to hip-hop/streetwear fashion, which is usually popular among their African/Hispanic American peers. In addition to their appearance, they tend to adapt the same colloquial language as their peers. Lastly, young ANNYS diligently follow and adapt hip-hop culture, well enough to be considered cultural “competence.” Throughout this volume, I will use the term, “persona,” to refer to the synthesis of the three major socio-cultural characteristics of social actors: fashion style, vernacular language and adaptation of mainstream popular culture. Socio-culturally speaking, ANNYS’ adaptation to hip-hop/street persona, which is apparently their hegemonic youth culture, is quite natural considering that they grew up with African/Hispanic American friends. Conformity is arguably the most common characteristics among the youth. Upon further observation, it came to my attention that Asian Americans lack an "original" persona. On a macro level, it could be translated into a question: “Do Asian Americans have their own original popular culture?” This question posed is based on my preliminary idea that the personas of the younger generation is chiefly trickled down from their celebrated popular media figures and icons. This project will

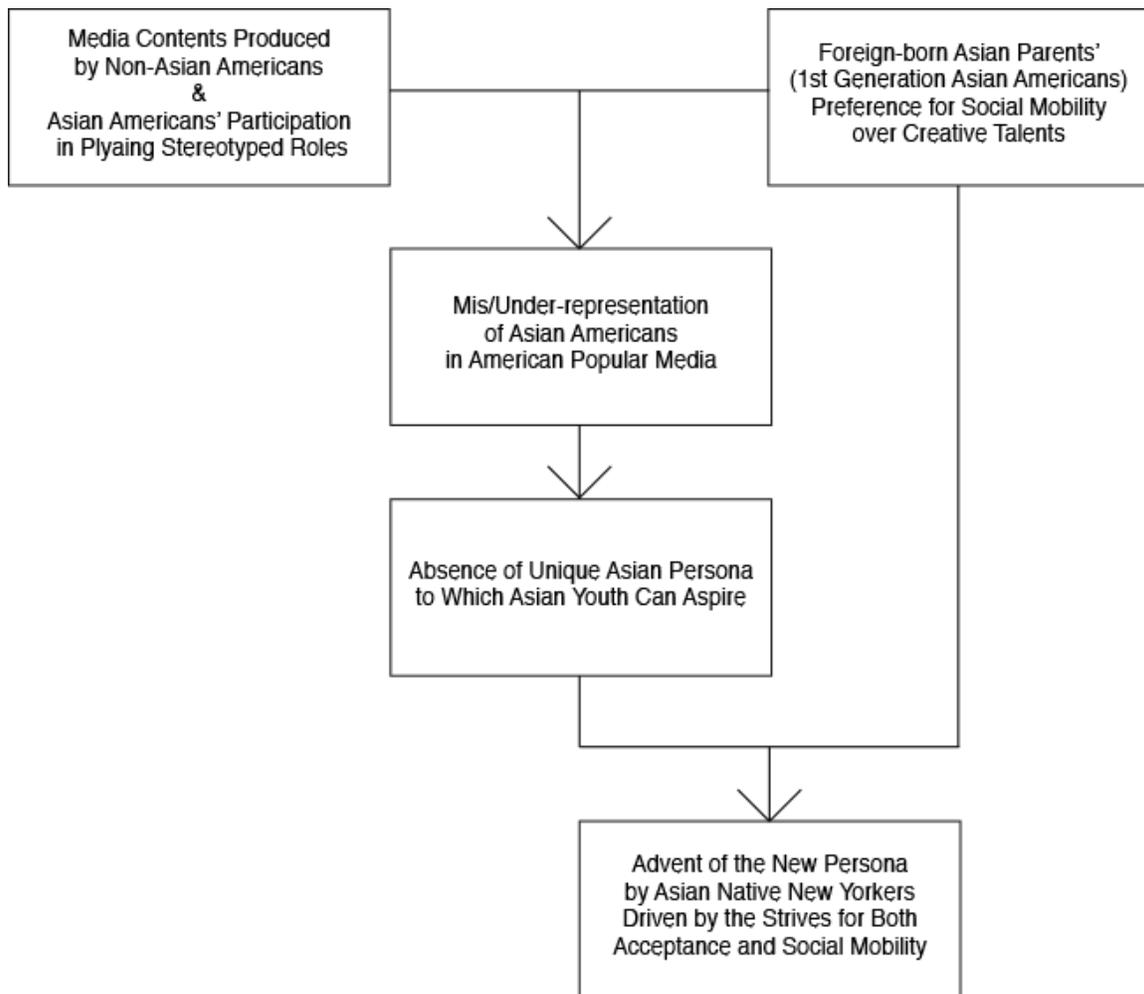
¹ Some are considered 1.5 generation meaning they moved to United States when they were young

dissect the reasons Asian Americans are mis/under-represented in popular media and in the consumer market, and how these issues are tied to the advent of the ANNY's new personas.

In American popular culture, the ways in which Asian Americans are represented are limited, skewed, and degraded, conveyed by other Americans who are culturally insensitive and indifferent. In addition to this problem, first generation Asian immigrants, poor and apprehensive, have pressured their children to pursue careers in law and medicine, jobs that promise security and prosperity. Pursuing a life in music, art, film, and entertainment was a far-fetched idea that was belittled. These said factors have created a shortage of Asian Americans pursuing a voice in the realm of popular culture, and the few that have made that stride are coerced into tertiary roles that only magnify the issue. With the absence of an iconic Asian figure in popular culture, second generation Asian Americans have adapted the personas of other cultures to gain social mobility and acceptance. As a result, the hybrid persona of young ANNYs have come into existence. The nature of these problems are cyclical. The initial problem sprouts new issues that only perpetuate and nurture the root of the problem. If Asian Americans are unable to find a resolution in the current state of popular culture and social order, they need to breakthrough onto an unripe platform that not only gives them the independence to control their own representation, but a platform that will also become the leading stage for popular culture (this exists online, a cyber platform).

Through the use of statistical data, field research and video interview, this essay will provide qualitative and quantitative research in order to explore this idea. The flowchart below organizes the relationship of ideas presented in the following chapters for a more comprehensive read.

1. Flowchart



(Re)defining Asian Americans

Before examining the research and analyses, it is necessary to pay attention to the meanings of the primary terms that will be crucial to this essay. Firstly, the term “Asian” has been ambiguously misused in our political and general conversations, especially when it is used without regional specifications such as “East,” “South East, or “South.” In fact, the word is politically incorrect and arguably offensive because of how generalizing it is. To provide a scale,

the estimated global population in 2015 was 7.349 billion; the population in Asia was estimated at 4.393 billion, approximately sixty-seven percent of the entire population. This enormous number is comprised of fifty-one different Asian countries.² According to geographer, Matt Rosenberg, Asia is 17,139,445 square miles big as the largest continent in area, which is bigger than the sum of North and South America. Furthermore, he says it has over ten times the population than that of North and South America combined.³ Therefore, when someone is identified as “Asian,” it is generalizing thousands of ethnic groups into a single enclave. It ignores the individual’s ethnic background and heritage. Despite this extremely myriad and inclusive concept of the term, the U.S. Bureau of the Census still defines “Asian” broadly and ambiguously: “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam. It includes people who indicate their race as "Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," "Japanese," "Vietnamese," and "Other Asian" or provide other detailed Asian responses.”⁴ This pan-ethnic definition of Asian is an oblivious form of racialization towards a minority group. For instance, many restaurant awnings have signs that read, "Asian Cuisine", a ridiculously broad categorization of different cultural foods under a single umbrella. Ironically, many of these restaurants are owned by people of Asian descent. Similarly, it is politically incorrect to use the word Asian to describe different categories: Asian music, Asian movie, Asian actor, Asian face, and so on. Furthermore, the U.S Bureau of the Census also uses the term "Far East" which is a eurocentric point of view.

² Geohive. Global Population Statistics. n.p. n.d. web. 10 March 2016. (<http://www.geohive.com/>)

³ Rosenberg, Matt. “Ranking of Continents by Area and Size.” *About Education*. 16 January 2016. web. 10 March 2016 (<http://geography.about.com/od/lists/a/largecontinent.htm>)

⁴ “Quick Facts: United States.” *United States Census Bureau*. United States Census Bureau. n.d. web. 10 March 2016. (<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>)

In other words, the "Far East" is far only from Europe of the Americas, and not far within the radius of Asia. For this reason, the terminology is based on a subjective perspective.

It is important to note that the term, "Asian American" was coined by the father of Asian American Studies, Yuji Ichioka, in late 1960's.⁵ Ichioka invented the term in order to identify the people of Asian heritages in the United States with a new politically proper connotation to confront racism and empower his people. This terminology replaced conventional derogatory terms like, "Orientals, Gooks, or Chinks" (Ono and Pham 9). Min Zhou and Jennifer Lee explain how the definition of the word has since been broadened, gaining overly generalized pan-ethnic categorization for the sake of other Americans who cannot distinguish the enormous diversity in their phenotypes, nationalities, languages, or cultures. (Lee and Zhou 11)

Under the agreement that the pan-ethnic definition of Asian (Americans) is being inappropriately used in academic discourse and in daily conversation, there needs to be a better understanding of how Asian Americans define themselves. Zhou and Lee say that most Asian Americans are usually unwilling to classify themselves as "Asian" or "Asian Americans", but prefer identify themselves with specific national origins (of their parents or grandparents who are considered first generation Americans) such as, Korean American, Japanese American, Chinese American, and so forth. (Lee and Zhou 12) Contrary to the contemporary inclusive pan-ethnic definition of Asian American, Asian Americans are able to clearly distinguish their groups from others via sociocultural characteristics, which are usually based on their country of origin. Furthermore, Asian Americans are commonly introduced by their peers by ethnic classification, "This is my Korean friend". Not only is it odd to preface one's ethnic background, but Asians are rarely introduced as Americans. To further my point, it is strange to introduce someone as one's

⁵ "Yuji Ichioka." *Densho Encyclopedia*. Densho Encyclopedia. n.d. web. 12 March 2016. (<http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Yuji%20Ichioka/>)

Italian American friend because it can be received as nonessential information. Another instance of this kind of ignorance can be found in the descriptions of Asian American celebrities in popular media. For example, when we search the profiles of Asian American actors such as Sung Kang and Steven Yeun (who are one of few Asian American actors somewhat “widely” recognized in American popular culture for their presences in mega-hit movies/TV show – *Fast & Furious* (2009)⁶ and *The Walking Dead*⁷), they are introduced as, “... is a Korean American actor...” even though it is obvious that they are citizens of the United States. The bios of other actors of different races, such as Brad Pitt (Caucasian), Denzel Washington (Black) or Benjamin Bratt (Hispanic), read “... is an American actor...” As previously mentioned, among Asian Americans, the country of origin is one of the clearest ways for them to recognize each other’s cultural habitus due to the vast distinction among different Asian national groups. For this reason, both first and second generation Asian Americans have a tendency to conform to communities/groups based on their national origins, and this conformity appears to create a homogenous culture within each group that can be distinguished in their choice of fashion, food, language, and popular culture. This phenomenon, however, is not exclusive to Asian Americans. For example, Italian Americans, Polish Americans, and Irish Americans, have all preserved unique qualities of their respective cultures in America, however, they are still identified as simply American, not *Polish American or Italian American*. When Asians are identified, their nationalities are always prefixed: Asian American, Korean American, Chinese American, Japanese American, etc. This is why the second generation ANNYs in Queens and Brooklyn are interesting, because most of them assimilate to the cultures of their African/Hispanic American neighbors’ or peers’-- the hip-hop/urban culture instead of adopting the “conventional” personas

⁶ *Fast & Furious*. Dir. Justin Lin. Perf. Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Michelle Rodriguez, and Sung Kang. Universal Pictures, 2009. Film.

⁷ *The Walking Dead*. AMC, 2010. Television.

that their parents are associated with. Many second generation ANNYs, including my interviewees, are actually “accepted” by their friends of other majority races (since African / Hispanic ethnicity is the majority in Queens and Brooklyn) and their hip-hop/street culture.

Lastly, it is crucial to understand the two commonly used terms: First generation and Second generation. Other groups of European national origins do not identify themselves by specific generation because their families have descended over several decades or even centuries in America. For instance, it is uncommon to hear one being asked, “Are you a third generation Polish American?” On the contrary, Asian Americans are frequently asked, not only their (or their parents’) countries of origin, but also their specific generations. Aside from the small groups of Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans who first immigrated to the United States from the turn of twentieth century, or during WWII, the Asian Americans population is predominantly constituted by first generation immigrants and their second generation offspring. To clarify, the Pew Research Center says, “First generation or foreign born refers to people born outside of the United States to parents neither of whom was a U.S. citizen.” and “Second generation refers to people born in the United States, with at least one first generation (immigrant) parent.”⁸ More important is the underlying meaning associated with these words when describing Asian Americans which tends to enforce “exoticism” or “foreignness”.

Introducing the Interviewees

All of the interviewees of this body of work are ANNYs, Asian Native New Yorkers, who are either 2nd generation or 1.5 generation Americans, meaning that they were born and raised in New York City, or that they immigrated to New York at an early age. English is their first and

⁸ “Second-Generation Americans: A Portrait of the Adult Children of Immigrants.” *Pew Research Center*. Pew Research Center, 7 February 2013. web. 14 March 2016. (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/02/07/second-generation-americans/>)

primary language, although most of them are bilingual due to the influence of their immigrant parents. Most of them have gone to public schools in Queens or Brooklyn, except for one Korean American, Joey Kim, who grew up in a predominately white neighborhood in Long Island. Except Kim, the interviewees state that hip-hop is the mainstream culture that they identify with most.

The interview component of this project functions as a psychological tool intended to evoke the interviewees' innermost thoughts on the subject. It is not a rhetoric device imposes opinionated ideas onto my interviewees. That is, the purpose was to obtain objective perspective from the interviewees. In addition, one of the most crucial and notable elements of filming the interviews was creating a "comfortable" ambience for the interviewees by discarding "artificial" studio gadgets, using only natural light and florescent lights on the ceiling, and utilizing only a small camera and microphone. I also had the interviewees visit the space several times prior to their interviews so that they can become familiar with the environment. Furthermore, the editing is minimal in order to avoid a didactic voice, which many documentaries oftentimes designate to push a specific message. In other words, there is no intention to implement a certain narrative to this collection of interviews. The interpretation is left open to the viewer, although this essay will make an analysis on the insight provided by the different interviewees.

Another imperative device I applied is the interview mediator. Paul Kang, a Korean American, born and raised in Queens, played a significant role during the interviews as the mediator. Kang studied English Literature at City College CUNY. He diligently follows hip-hop culture, enabling him to freely switch codes making him a suitable candidate to mediate the interviews. I implemented Kang as a liaison in order to validate the credibility of the interviews by adapting the sociological methodology of "going native." The co-authors of the book,

Cultural Sociology: An Introduction, explains this concept, saying, "... considerable emphasis is placed on the importance of securing reliable gatekeepers - individuals within the field with comprehensive insider knowledge and connections, who can be trusted to guide the researcher effectively in establishing field relations" (33-34). Kang, as an "insider", would be able invoke more valuable and natural anecdotes from interviewees through casual and mundane conversation. The insights, comments, and ideas brought up by the interviewees will be implemented throughout the following sections.

Presences of Asian Faces in Everyday Life of New Yorkers

The research and analysis on the subject of this volume has been executed with an organic apparatus, which includes quantitative, qualitative, and empirical methods, rather than relying on a particular instrument. The field research started from an accidental observation. I was in a branch on Fortieth Street and Eighth Avenue, of one of the biggest chain convenient stores in New York, Duane Reade. While browsing grooming products, I realized the many faces on the packaging of these products. The products seemed to be categorized by "types" of people – hair types, skin types or ethnicities. I intuitively searched for the appropriate product for thin straight black hair, dry fair skin, and products suitable for "Asian" features. Oddly enough, among the hundreds of cosmetic/grooming products, there was not a single product with an Asian face, even though entire sections were devoted to different people. This realization took me by surprise, but even more shocking was that I had not noticed up until that moment. It led me to ponder if others have also overlooked this fact.

Based on the vague concept of "Asian" by the U.S. Bureau of Census in mind (whether fairly defined or not), I have meticulously photographed the products of categories under cosmetics and art within New York City. Though loosely executed, the documented photographs

provide a general idea about where Asian Americans are standing in American consumer culture, specifically in New York City. Firstly, the photos of the magazines are taken from the branches of New York's largest bookstore, Barnes & Noble, and from the newsstands of randomized locations in the MTA subway stations. Out of approximately 294 magazine covers, only thirty-five African/Hispanic faces and seven Asian faces, which is 2.4 percent. Four out of the seven magazine covers with Asian faces were in regards to yoga, martial arts, Buddhism, and the other three were fashion covers. None of them were part of popular culture or politics. After analyzing the entire section for Art at Barnes and Nobles I was only able to find two Asian-related books; one was about Japanese manga and the other one called "China Collectors" with two ancient Chinese figures on the cover. On a separate floor for children's toys, not a single product was found with the faces of Asian children. There were dolls that represented different ethnicities, but not a single one that represented an Asian demographic. I also paid close attention to the cosmetic/grooming products since the packaging of these products are generally printed with the faces of models. The photos of the products are taken in New York's largest convenience stores: Duane Reade, CVS and Rite Aid. Out of 244 products with faces on the packaging, thirty-eight products had African/Hispanic faces, and only two products had Asian faces, both of which were female, which makes up 0.8%. There were no products that represented Asian males. Living in New York, there are specialty stores that carry grooming products with Asian faces in neighborhoods with a concentrated Asian demographic like Koreatown in 32nd St and Chinatown. These specialty stores, however, primarily carry imported goods made specifically in Asian countries. This lack of representation in the consumer market suggests that Asian Americans are being largely disregarded.

Invisibility of Asian Americans in Popular Media

The lack of representation of Asian Americans in daily life is intertwined with the “invisibility” of Asian Americans in popular media. Zhou and Lee claim that Asian American youth culture is absent in mainstream American media whereas the images of white, black and Hispanic youths are prevalent in the media from television shows, movies, music, and fashion whether it is stereotypical or not. (Lee and Zhou 19) In the music industry, specifically hip-hop and R&B has been predominantly mainstream, topping other genres of music. For example, as of March 2016, six out of the top ten albums (and three out of the top five albums) on the Billboard chart are hip-hop/R&B based albums by blacks and Latinos.⁹ In contrast, not a single musician with an Asian heritage could be found in the list of the top 200 album on the billboard. It is evident that American mainstream popular culture has peripheralized Asian Americans. This peripheralization also exists in the film/television industry. In “2014 Hollywood Diversity Report”¹⁰ by Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA shows that 10.5% of lead actors, 12.2% of directors, and 7.6% of writers were minorities (non-white) among the theatrical films released in 2011. Along with the percentage of minority lead actors and directors, we ought to pay attention to the highly marginalized minority writers too, since it is unlikely that a white writer will produce a story with a minority protagonist. Furthermore, only 5.1% of the lead actors were minority among broadcast comedies and dramas, and 14.7% of lead actors were minority among cable comedies and dramas during the 2011-12 season. What needs to be understood is that the general public, and even many scholars, are oftentimes oblivious to the

⁹ “Billboard 200.” *Billboard*. Billboard, n.d. web. 26 March 2016. (<http://www.billboard.com/charts/billboard-200/2016-04-02>)

¹⁰ “2014 Hollywood Diversity Report: Making Sense of the Disconnect.” *Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA*. Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA, February 2014, pdf. 26 March 2016. (<http://www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2-12-14.pdf>)

fact that Asian Americans are the most marginalized group in the realm of popular media. On the other hand, research and statistics reveals the truth about the presence of Asian Americans in the media. Journalist, Justin Chan, who primarily writes about Asian Americans and their representation in the media, says a publisher, Lee & Low Books, reveals “just eight of the top 100 best-selling sci-fi and fantasy films from Hollywood had a protagonist of color.”¹¹ He also says, “Asians made up just 4.4 percent of speaking characters across last year’s (2014) top 100 grossing movies, according to a University of Southern California study.” USC Annenberg’s Media, Diversity, & Social Change and Initiative has reported the examination of gender and race/ethnicity across the 100 top-grossing fictional films every year (700 films in accumulation from 2007 to 2014). From their latest report *Inequality in 700 Popular Films: Examining Portrayals of Gender, Race, & LGBT Status from 2007 to 2014*,¹² it is clear where Asian Americans stand in the film industry. From 2007 to 2014, among the top 100 films, 5.3% had Asian actors. Over 40% of the top 100 movies have no Asian speaking characters. Some may argue that the numbers are proportionate to the Asian population in relations to the total population in America, which is about 5.3%, according to U.S. population estimation for 2013 by the U.S. Census Bureau. The underrepresentation of Asian Americans is still significantly worse when it comes to leading characters. Across the 100 top films released in 2014, less than 2% of the protagonist characters were played by Asian Americans (which means there were about two Asian leading characters). Furthermore, out of 779 directors who directed the 700 top films between 2007 and 2014, only 2.4% were Asian/Asian American. These numbers reveal the

¹¹ Chan, Justin. “Where are All the Asian Americans in Hollywood?” *Complex Media Inc.* Complex Media Inc., 20 August 2014. web. 27 March 2016. (<http://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2014/08/asian-americans-in-hollywood>)

¹² “Inequality in 700 Popular Films: Examining Portrayals of Gender, Race, & LGBT Status from 2007 to 2014.” *USC Annenberg’s Media, Diversity, & Social Change and Initiative.* USC Annenberg’s Media, Diversity, & Social Change and Initiative, n.d. web. 27 March 2016. (<http://annenberg.usc.edu/pages/~media/MDSCI/Inequality%20in%20700%20Popular%20Films%2081415.ashx>)

reason Asian actors or the stories of Asian Americans is so underrepresented. One of the interviewees, Louis Yeung, states that he and his sister only watched Hong Kong dramas as they grew. He explains that he was unable to engage with American television. Yeung and interviewee Johnny Li claim that a new TV series, *Fresh Off the Boat*¹³, which is about a Chinese immigrant family, with the older son as a main character who adopts to American Culture via hip-hop, is one of the only American TV shows that they can engage with. Based on the statistics and the interviewees' personal experiences, we could draw a conclusion that Asian Americans are highly underrepresented in contemporary American media, and when they are, they tend to be misrepresented. At this point, it is necessary to pay attention to how Asian Americans have been presented in the media and how it has affected the lives of Asian Americans.

Model Minority and Media Representation of Male Asian Americans

Asian Americans are marginalized not only in the media but also in daily life, and when they are represented at all, it is through an inaccurate and stereotyped lens. Most Asian Americans I have met in New York, including some of the interviewees, tell me that they have experienced unprovoked name-calling, which I myself have experienced countless. The most striking fact in the name-calling towards Asians is that it is primarily based on the stereotypical media representation, like the model minority persona, comics, or specific characters from movies/TV shows.

The term, model minority first appeared in the article, "Success Story: Japanese-American Style," from New York Times Magazine in 1966 followed by another article, "Success story of One Minority in the U.S.," from U.S. News and World Report. The term essentially

¹³ *Fresh Off the Boat*. 20th Century Fox Television, 2015. Television.

generalizes Asian Americans as a law-abiding group with higher educational and economical achievement. The author of “Asian Americans at the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Images in the 1960s and 1980s,” (Ono and Pham 80) Keith Osajima insists the model minority myth creates resentment and tension from other minority groups towards Asian Americans, saying, “Ultimately, we argue that the model minority myth overtly masks racist policies, attitudes, and representations by alternating between admiration for and fear of Asians and Asian Americans, thereby dishing up tired problematic stereotypes such as yellow peril masquerading as flattery, and by doing so rendering it difficult to challenge and critique such representations.” (Ono and Pham 81) a statement parallel to my interviewees’ understanding of the term. In contemporary media, the representation of Asian Americans has been “better” in the sense that yellowface characters have been restricted up until the mid-century, however, the problematic misrepresentation of Asian Americans as smart, hard-working, yet un-confrontational people has been upheld by the media.

In a recent movie, *The Big Short* (2015),¹⁴ one of the main character Jared Vannett’s line reflects how the media likes to portray Asian Americans. He says, “Jiang is my quant. Look at him, he doesn't even speak English. He won a national math competition in China. China. Yeah I’m sure of the math.” Then, Jiang turns to camera and says, “Actually I do speak English. Jared likes to say I don’t because he thinks it makes me seem more authentic. And I finished second in the national math competition. Some people at work think Jared’s a dick but he’s great at his job.”¹⁵ This portrayal not only articulates the typical stereotypified “geeky” mathematical genius roles by Asian Americans in Hollywood, but also confirms the passive response towards this

¹⁴ *The Big Short*. dir. Adam McKay. perf. Christian Bale, Steve Carell, and Ryan Gosling. Regency Enterprises, 2015. Film.

¹⁵ “The Big Short.” *Paramount Guilds*. Paramount Guilds, n.d. Pdf. 29 March 2016. (<http://www.paramountguilds.com/pdf/the-big-short.pdf>)

phenomenon by Asian Americans. Depicting Asian Americans as smart but “dorky” characters is unexceptional in Television shows. Dr. Christina Yang in *Grey’s Anatomy*,¹⁶ Vincent Masuka in *Dexter*,¹⁷ Dr. George Huang in *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*,¹⁸ Dr. Max Bergman in *Hawaii Five-O*,¹⁹ Dr. Ken Jeong in *Dr. Ken*,²⁰ and the characters in *Fresh Off the Boat* all portray Asian Americans either with smart professions such as doctors and forensic specialist or “typical” comical Asian family trying to “survive” in America. There are a few cases that Asian Americans play charismatic or heroic roles in the TV shows such as *Lost*,²¹ *Hawaii Five-O* and *The Walking Dead* yet it appears to be too rare to break the inaccurate status quo media representation of Asian Americans in my observation. Some of the interviewees as An Rong Xu and Jaeki Cho comprehend the term, model minority, as a myth maliciously created by the white journalists during the 1960s to pit Asian Americans against other minorities. Unlike them, some other interviewees such as Joey Kim and Louis Yeung insist that the term itself should not be adversely perceived since those characteristics are, in fact, virtues although they acknowledge why it could be problematic when the media caricaturizes Asians and Asian Americans based on this term.

Another commonly distorted representation of Asian Americans portrayed in Hollywood is a martial arts master who speaks broken English (in the case of Asian women, a vixen-dragon lady character). This kind of martial artist persona is a deceiving concept, though, since it is disguised as a “masculine” character fighting against the villains. However, counter-intuitively, most of these characters are demasculinized by being desexualized. The precedent of this

¹⁶ *Grey’s Anatomy*. Touchstone Television, 2005. Television.

¹⁷ *Dexter*. Showtime Networks, 2006. Television.

¹⁸ *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Universal Network Television, 1999. Television.

¹⁹ *Hawaii Five-O*, CBS Production, 2010. Television.

²⁰ *Dr. Ken*. ABC Studios, 2015. Television.

²¹ *Lost*, ABC Studios, 2004. Television.

persona was Bruce Lee (1940-1973) through his action movies in the 70s. Even though Lee was born in California, United States, his family moved back to Hong Kong when he was three months old, and Lee grew up there until he returned to the States at the age of eighteen. For this reason, Lee had a Cantonese accent. Lee as a small but extremely masculine Asian man played several heroic roles in the 60s and 70s, beating the villains/opponents of other races. Lee promptly became sensational and loved by a wide range of Americans regardless of their age, sex, or ethnicity. His fast, agile, charismatic, and philosophical characteristic put him in a respectable light. Yet, the problem from this phenomenon is that Lee was still portrayed as a foreigner, alienated from American culture with his Cantonese accent. Another problematic aspect of Bruce Lee's sensation is that he was a desexualized Kung Fu master lacking romantic or sensual scenes with female characters. We should not forget Lee's contribution to the presence of Asian Americans in popular media yet these two main tropes of Asian martial arts masters in the media has been maintained by his modern "successors" such as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Donnie Yen, though none of them are Americans. Among these figures, Jackie Chan's character from a hit movie, *Rush Hour (1998)*,²² is arguably the most "memorable" character by other Americans especially African Americans because the second protagonist was played by a black actor/comedian, Chris Tucker. Even though the movie was a big hit which was exceptional for a movie with an Asian protagonist, the conventional Asian Kung Fu trope somewhat turned even more distorted by Chan's character by his comically choreographed slapstick action scenes and his broken English being a subject of ridicule. In addition, the characters in mainstream movies played by Chinese actors like Chan and Li, are typically foreign body guard figures. The head and co-founder of MANAA (the Media Action Network for Asian Americans), Guy Aoki,

²² *Rush Hour*. dir. Brett Ratner. perf. Jackie Chan and Chris Talker. New Line Cinema, 1998. Film.

discusses this issue during the interview for *Kababayan Today*.²³ He says Asian men have historically played a narrow spectrum of characters such as villains or martial artists who are scarcely paired with non-Asian female characters (and Asian female characters are always paired with non-Asian male characters). Even when they are paired with female characters, the movies usually exclude romantic scenes such as kiss scenes or sex scenes. One of my interviewees, An Rong, points out the same problem of demasculinization of male Asian characters, exemplifying Jet Li's movie, *Romeo Must Die* (2000)²⁴. He says that it does not make sense that Li's character and Aaliyah's character (the female protagonist) hug in the ending scene without even a kiss, considering the context of their relationship throughout the movie. Rong compares it to other archetypal action movies with Caucasian actors which would have unmistakably lead to the two characters having sex. Furthermore, the name, Jackie Chan, is being used as the most commonly used ethnic slur towards male Asian Americans, which many of my interviewees confessed from their experiences (I myself have several experiences of being called this name by other American adults, teens, and even toddlers.). We ought to pay attention to the distorted media representation of Asian Americans because most name-calling and bullying towards Asian Americans are based on misrepresentation built by the media. Many of my interviewees expressed that they are expected to be smart simply because they are Asian or that they have been called Jackie Chan as a form of ridicule. The general public in the US seem to be oblivious about how these images of Asians and Asian Americans in the media have unconsciously formed their perceptions. Kent Ono and Vincent Pham speak of this subconscious yet profound dynamic between people's mind and media representation, "When we say representations of Asians and Asian Americans, we mean the complex range of strategies used by the media, sometimes

²³ Kababayan Today. "Asian Men Stereotypes in Media." Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 8 March 2012. web. 30 March 2016. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQoA9X3ZuTs>)

²⁴ *Romeo Must Die*. dir. Andrzej Bartkowiak.perf. Jet Li and Aaliyah. Warner Bros., 2000. Film.

arbitrarily, to characterize Asians and Asian Americans. These representations have effects, both immediate and deferred. While they register on the senses and in the mind, the collective and often repeated images, narratives, and narrative structures become part of memory, both individual and social. We also mean to suggest that early representations of Asians and Asian Americans, through their repetition and power to educate audiences, may be reproduced across time unwittingly, since new templates may not be available.” (Ono and Pham 8) As Ono and Pham explain, there are no positive figures accurately representing Asian Americans, which could perhaps be a key in overcoming the defamatory stereotypes that Asian Americans are held by.

Another stereotyped depiction of Asians and Asian Americans is as a group of non-confrontational and submissive immigrants. Spike Lee’s movie, *Do the Right Thing* (1989), portrays the racial tension between the black neighbors in Brooklyn and Korean grocers. Some may argue that his representation of Korean grocers is quite accurate and non problematic, however, I see two problems from the following scenes. First is how grossly caricatured the Korean grocers are; the male grocer played by Korean American comedian/actor, Stephen Park, who acts an intentionally exaggerated English accent. Asian American aspiring to become actors may argue that these are the only roles that are available to them, however, it is undeniable that they become part of the problem by representing their own people disgraceful for the sake of their careers. While Spike Lee attempts to challenge racism in his movies, he fails to accurately depict Asian Americans by portraying them as passive bystanders. As a matter of fact, Lee oftentimes implements the stereotypical portrayals of various racial groups in New York City in order to present the malice between different racial groups. In *Do the Right Thing*, as well, a dialogue of the senior black neighbor complaining about Korean grocers exemplifies it:

“Look at those Korean motherfuckers across the street. I betcha they haven't been a year off da motherfucking boat before they opened up their own place... A motherfucking year off the motherfucking boat and got a good business in our neighborhood occupying a building that had been boarded up for longer than I care to remember and I've been here a long time... Now for the life of me, I haven't been able to figger this out. Either dem Koreans are geniuses or we Blacks are dumb.”²⁵

In his another movie, *25th Hour* (2002)²⁶, he epitomizes the racial hatred via the main character Monty Brogan's rant over all different kinds of racial groups existing in New York:

“Fuck you and this whole city and everyone in it. Fuck the panhandlers, grubbing for money, and smiling at me behind my back. Fuck squeegee men dirtying up the clean windshield of my car. Get a fucking job. Fuck the Sikhs and the Pakistanis bombing down the avenues in decrepit cabs, curry steaming out their pores and stinking up my day. Terrorists in fucking training. Slow the fuck down. Fuck the Chelsea boys with their waxed chests and pumped up biceps. Going down on each other in my parks and on my piers, jingling their dicks on my Channel 35. Fuck the Korean grocers with their pyramids of overpriced fruit and their tulips and roses wrapped in plastic. Ten years in the country, still no speaky English? Fuck the Russians in Brighton Beach. Mobster thugs sitting in cafés, sipping tea in little glasses, sugar cubes between their teeth. Wheelin' and dealin' and schemin'. Go back where you fucking came from. Fuck the black-hatted Chassidim, strolling up and down 47th street in their dirty gabardine with their dandruff. Selling South African apartheid diamonds. Fuck the Wall Street brokers. Self-styled masters of the universe. Michael Douglas, Gordon Gecko wannabe mother fuckers, figuring out new ways to rob hard working people blind. Send those Enron assholes to jail for fucking life. You think Bush and Cheney didn't know about that shit? Give me a fucking break... Fuck the Puerto Ricans. 20 to a car, swelling up the welfare rolls, worst fuckin' parade in the city. And don't even get me started on the Dom-in-i-cans, because they make the Puerto Ricans look good. Fuck the Bensonhurst Italians with their pomaded hair, their nylon warm-up suits, and their St. Anthony medallions. Swinging their, Jason Giambi, Louisville slugger, baseball bats, trying to audition for the Sopranos. Fuck the Upper East Side wives with their Hermés scarves and their fifty-dollar Balducci artichokes. Overfed faces getting pulled and lifted and stretched, all taut and shiny. You're not fooling anybody, sweetheart. Fuck the uptown brothers. They never pass the ball, they don't want to play defense, they take fives steps on every lay-up to the hoop. And then they want to turn around and blame everything on the white man. Slavery ended one hundred and thirty seven years ago. Move the fuck on. Fuck the corrupt cops with their anus violating plungers and their 41 shots, standing behind a blue wall of silence. You betray our trust. Fuck the priests who put their hands down some innocent child's pants. Fuck the church that protects them, delivering us into evil. And while you're

²⁵ “Do the Right Thing (1989).” *Screenplays for You*. Screenplays for You, n.d. web. 1 April 2016. (https://sfy.ru/?script=do_the_right_thing)

²⁶ *25th Hour*. dir. Spike Lee. perf. Edward Norton, Barry Pepper and Philip Seymour Hoffman. 40 Acres and A Mule Filmworks, 2003. Film.

at it, fuck JC. He got off easy. A day on the cross, a weekend in hell, and all the hallelujahs of the legioned angels for eternity. Try seven years in fuckin Otisville, Jay. Fuck Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and backward-ass, cave-dwelling, fundamentalist assholes everywhere. On the names of innocent thousands murdered, I pray you spend the rest of eternity with your seventy-two whores roasting in a jet-fueled fire in hell. You towel headed camel jockeys can kiss my royal, Irish ass... Fuck this whole city and everyone in it. From the row houses of Astoria to the penthouses on Park Avenue. From the projects in the Bronx to the lofts in Soho. From the tenements in Alphabet City to the brownstones in Park slope to the split levels in Staten Island. Let an earthquake crumble it. Let the fires rage. Let it burn to fucking ash then let the waters rise and submerge this whole, rat-infested place.”²⁷

I doubt Lee instruments these scenes out of malice. In fact, his aim is to bring awareness to racism, showing that violence is not the solution to the problem. The biggest mistakes, however, is that it lacks the explanatory and analytical devices which makes the narrative tacit. In other words, these films fail to explain the fundamental reasons why these malicious stereotypical perceptions towards other racial groups could be problematic. These scenes become subconsciously embedded in the audience's' memories, molding them down to a specific impression on a certain race without having them dialectically think about the phenomenon. In other words, the implicit message that Lee attempts to deliver is less impressionable than the explicit stereotypes that he builds in his films. These movies that bring light to racism never compel the audience to think about racism on a sociological level, while the exaggerated stereotypical representation remain in their mind in the form of psychological residue.

The comical caricaturization of Asians and Asian Americans in popular media is another major issue, usually presented through white Hollywood and TV, or by Asian Americans performing self-satirical acts. One of the “classic” examples is the yellowface performance of

²⁷ “25th Hour (2002) Movie Script.” *Springfield! Springfield!*. Springfield! Springfield!, n.d. web. 1 April 2016. (http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie_script.php?movie=25th-hour)

Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961)²⁸ played by a Caucasian actor, Mickey Rooney. Mr. Yunioshi's taped eyes to mimic "chinky eyed" features and fake protruding teeth has been deemed as a severely racist depiction of Asian features. Yellowface performance has been rather scarce for its apparent political incorrectness yet the comical representation of Asians and Asian Americans has continued in our contemporary media via funny sidekick roles in numerous movies and TV dramas. Often times, Asian Americans themselves execute "humorous" representation of Asians and Asian Americans. A Korean-American female comic, Margaret Cho, has been known for her jokes about her parents and grandparents, utilizing their broken English as the core of her comedy. When her North Korean costume became controversial, she responded to the public via her social media platform, saying, "I can do whatever I want when it comes to Koreans – North Koreans, South Koreans. I'm not playing the race card, I'm playing the rice card. I'm the only person in the world, probably, that can make these jokes and not be placed in a labor camp."²⁹ What she fails to understand is that her performances engender a distorted perception of Asian Americans to the mind of others watching from the outside. While other Americans may find her comedy amusing, most Korean Americans I have met find the jokes uncomfortable, especially when they feel their cultural background being belittled by other race groups. Some argue that self-satire exists in every culture, however, this comical representation is one of the very few ways in which Asian Americans are depicted, along with being a martial artist, female vixen, or geeky genius. This type of representation hinders Asian American actors from being able to pursue "normal" roles: romance, action, or even mundane roles. This is all a result of the repeated distorted representation in mainstream media. It has

²⁸ *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. dir. Blake Edwards. perf. Audrey Hepburn, George Peppard and Patricia Neal. Jurow-Shepherd, 1961. Film.

²⁹ Phillip, Abby. "Was Margaret Cho's North Korea act biting comedy or just racist?" The Washington Post, 12 January 2015. web. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2015/01/12/was-margaret-chos-north-korea-act-biting-comedy-or-just-racist/>)

furthered the "foreignness" of Asian Americans, creating a greater distance between Asians and other racial groups in America. Min Zhou and J. V. Gatewood say, "... the perception of Asian Americans as "foreigners" has imposed and perpetuated the "otherness" on the group... it is the socially imposed category based on phenotype, rather than acculturation and social mobility, that governs the way group members are received and treated in American Society." (Zhou & Gatewood 132)

During the interview, Jaeki Cho talks about his experience of playing an extra role in a TV show, *Power*³⁰. He says he had to play a "Korean hipster thug in K-pop style," which is a fictional character created by the white producers which he considers to be a huge misrepresentation of Korean Americans. He acknowledges that these white producers come up with these scenes and characters not out of malice but out of ignorance and indifference. One thing that Jaeki and the other interviewees endorse is the independent media production by Asian Americans, instead of relying on production managed by others. One of the few existing examples can be found in the mega-hit "Fast" series: *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006). The character, Han, played by Korean American actor, Sung Kang, is depicted as a charismatic and masculine Asian American man. He is romantically paired with the non-Asian female characters, which is incredibly rare for a Hollywood film. The unconventional portrayal of an Asian man was largely possibly because the director of the three movies is Taiwanese American. My interviewees agree that there currently is a small number of Asians in the creative fields. They explain that this transition will take time and that the future will be more promising.

Foreign-born Asian parents' preference for social mobility via high-income professions over other creative fields has also contributed the phenomenon. The interviewees, though, believe that their children's generation would be encouraged to cultivate creative talents, and that

³⁰ *Power*. CBS Television Studios, 2014. Television.

representation will improve with time. In relation to the necessity of Asian Americans' independent media contents, numerous interviewees claim that Youtube is the genesis of it. It is argued that the internet has grown to be more influential than traditional media and television among the young, and this will continue to be the trend. In many ways, platforms like Youtube have democratized content allowing Asian Americans to create a unique voice and to be celebrated globally by their online viewers, some with hundreds of millions of views already.

The Hybridized Hip-hop/Street Persona of ANNYs

Queens and Brooklyn boroughs have distinct demographic characteristics compared to other boroughs of New York City. Firstly, according to United States Census Bureau, white population is a little less than 40% in Queens borough³¹ and a little over 40% in Kings County (Brooklyn Borough)³². In Queens, the population of Hispanic heritage is the second biggest group after the white, and Asian American population is the third biggest followed by black/African American population. In Brooklyn, Black/African American population is the second largest followed by Hispanics as the third and Asians as the fourth. The most interesting fact about the demographics of these two boroughs is the amount of foreign born people that compose the population: 47.8% in Queens and 37.5% in Brooklyn. Considering only 13.1% out of the entire United States population is foreign born persons, Queens and Brooklyn boroughs are highly concentrated with immigrant families. In fact, one of the interviewees, Johnny Li, emphasizes the common struggle of immigrant families regardless of their ethnicities, which is why he thinks the people in Queens and Brooklyn can relate to each other more than other ethnic

³¹ Quick Facts: Queens County (Queens Borough), New York." *United States Census Bureau*. United States Census Bureau. n.d. web. 4 April 2016.
(<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/36081,36047,00>)

³² Quick Facts: Kings County (Brooklyn Borough), New York." *United States Census Bureau*. United States Census Bureau. n.d. web. 4 April 2016.
(<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/36047,36081,00>)

groups that exist in other parts of the country. Jaeki Cho says in his interview that the white people he knows are not typical WASP, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, with a long history in the States but they are Euro-white immigrants. The other interviewees also agree that the culture that they share and the social interaction between different racial communities is very natural among American-born-English-speaking children of immigrant families; their parents, however, tend to interact only with people of the same ethnic background. In even more severe cases, Louis Yeung states that his parents interact exclusively with Chinese people from a certain region that speak a specific dialect. Yeung perceives this inclusion to be problematic and believes that as Asian Americans begin to intermingle more, they will find a voice in politics and media; it's about building the bridges. Another intriguing phenomenon he points out is that New York City, counterintuitively, is not more pan-ethnic than other cities. He says he has seen clearer ethnic distinction ever since he graduated high school. As a matter of fact, most of my interviewees, Jaeki Cho, Johnny Li, Louis Yeung including the mediator, Paul Kang, speak of similar revelation of ethnic and economical division upon entering college located out of their neighborhoods, insisting interracial socializing becomes somewhat rare. At this point, it seems necessary to look into the youth culture of ANNYs' to see why they are better at interethnic socializing than their parents (or other Americans), and , more importantly, what kind of aspects are conducive to their hybridized hip-hop/street persona.

Aside from Joey Kim who grew up in Long Island, who I chose to interview as a category of model minority, all the interviewees grew up in the lower-middle class neighborhoods in Queens and Brooklyn concentrated with diverse immigrant families. Among the ANNYs I interviewed, there is a common interest they share, hip-hop music. An Rong Xu, Jaeki Cho, and Johnny Li commonly say they could relate to hip-hop because of the lyrics that

talk about struggle living as a minority in America. Xu says, on the other hand, he could not empathize with the lyrics of “white” music such as heavy metal or rock music because it was unrelatable. Yeung says that he intuitively was drawn to hip-hop because it was the mainstream music among their peers. Hip hop to these ANNYs was not simply a genre of music, but it also offered a lifestyle.

Contemporary hip-hop fashion has evolved from its initial style of loose fit and bright colors to a category referred to as streetwear. The tone of streetwear is usually muted. The modern streetwear style is usually styled with baggy outerwears, elongated tops, and skinny jeans along with chunky sneakers. In fact, the youth culture does not necessarily recognize streetwear as hip-hop fashion but it generally accompanies hip-hop culture because numerous celebrated hip-hop musicians have adopted this streetwear style. Another imperative constituent of hip-hop culture is its specific manner of speaking. Hip-hop culture is recognized with its vernacular language. Interestingly, this accent has been adopted by numerous young ANNYs who grew up in Queens and Brooklyn adapting a lifestyle around hip-hop. One of the interviewees, Jaeki, is an apparent example of it with his thick accent although most of the interviewees have a similar manner of speaking. An Rong in his interview brings up “AZN” culture, a movement popular while he was growing up. It refers to a group of young Asian Americans who adopt a hip-hop persona including the specific way of speaking, and pit themselves specifically against “white culture.”

The mediator, Paul Kang, explains that hip-hop plays a significant role in pan-ethnic interaction among young native New Yorkers, regardless of their ethnic background. In this respect, it seems plausible to say that hip-hop culture functions as a cultural axis in American youth culture. To an extent, hip-hop culture could be considered as a new form of “cultural

capital”³³; It requires a certain level of knowledge and practice, which has been passed down for generations since its advent in the 70s. However, the difference is, if Bourdieu’s cultural capital is limitedly applied to conventional “high” culture of the upper social strata, hip-hop, as a neo cultural capital, has been practiced and descended by a wide range of social strata. Another difference is that the concept of Bourdieu’s cultural capital quintessentially stemmed from the upper class’s attempt to make their culture exclusive from the rest of the social strata whereas hip-hop provides social mobility. Due to the democratization of the fashion industry via social media, this neo cultural capital could be channeled into economic gain regardless of the socio-economic backgrounds. For example, there are street fashion brands that have been able to organically grow through social media platforms and word of mouth, becoming leaders of hip-hop/street lifestyle. Some other companies, in addition, have experienced instant success because certain mega hip-hop celebrities have worn and represented their products. For instance, arguably the most influential hip-hop artist, Kanye West, has accelerated the growth of numerous emerging clothing brands by simply wearing its product. Unlike high-class exclusiveness of conventional cultural capital, hip-hop culture does not restrict access, which allows anyone to utilize the culture for economical or political position. The influence of mega hip-hop musicians is oftentimes acknowledged by politicians including president Obama. In other words, hip-hop does not create social boundaries, instead it provides an opportunity to people of diverse demographics. Interviewee, Jaeki Cho, mentions these successful cases of hip-hop/streetwear clothing brands owned by young Asian Americans who utilized the experiences and infrastructures established by their parents as garment workers and the factory owners. For this

³³ Matt Wray explains the term: “Cultural capital is the term we use to designate this feature of high-status culture: middle- and upper-class parents pass it along to their children, investing them with the knowledge they need to appear sophisticated and mannered, but parents in working-class and poor families do not.” (Wray xxix)

reason, I think hip-hop culture has been appreciated as a new type of potential meritocratic ladder by a number of young ANNYs from lower-middle class families.

Hip-hop music is now part of mainstream culture, evident in the number of top albums in the Billboard chart. Although it appears that hip-hop culture has been widely adopted by a wide range of demographics, hip-hop music still predominantly influenced by African American and Hispanic American artists. In other words, there are still no leading Asian hip-hop musicians. In addition, other races' attempts to adopt the hip-hop persona oftentimes turn into an issue of cultural appropriation. For instance, when non-black Americans' adapt hip-hop's vernacular language and style, it is deemed controversial and often considered as "taboos." Interestingly though, based on the interviewees' experiences, ANNYs who grew up in the neighborhoods with a high concentration of African Americans and Hispanic Americans are "allowed" to perform these taboos. As a critical example, Jaeki Cho talks about his experiences with the N-word. He says he did not realize the political sensitivity of the N-word until he graduated high school and started going to college. He explains that while growing up, it was commonly used towards him by his black/Hispanic friends and vice versa. In other words, it was "acceptable." Yet he speaks of his revelation of the term being unable to be used under varying social, academic, and professional situation. Paul Kang, on the other hand, says he was always aware of the political sensitivity of the word. He says he knew the word should not be used under certain academic and professional settings, yet it was still a commonly used in conversation. This phenomenon, though, ought not to be a subject of criticism, because hip-hop culture is apparently the habitus (in Pierre Bourdieu's term) of a lot of ANNYs including Jaeki and Kang. According to the book, *Cultural Sociology: An Introduction*, the habitus is "something we all possess but of which we are mostly unaware – is the means by which people come to develop systems of likes and

dislikes, they way they form and repeat social practices, and also the set of guiding principles and procedures that they use in their relations with objects and others.” (55) That is, habitus refers to cultural dispositions chosen and practiced by individuals based on their relations to the peers and environments in their social life. (58) In this respect, ANNYs’ possessing a “hood” accent is as normal as Asian Americans’ living in the south with “southern accents”. In my observation and based upon the comments by the interviewees, this phenomenon seems to be an illusion that is only applicable within the radius of schools among teenagers. In other words, young ANNYs’ assimilated “hood accent” still appears to be considered “abnormal” by other Americans that live out of their communities as some of the interviewees asserted during the interviews.

Although numerous ANNYs have adapted the hip-hop/street persona from their black/Hispanic peers, there are still traces of the conventional characteristics of Asian Americans -- statistically, they have maintained higher grades compared to their non-Asian peers. According to NYC Department of Education, Asian students (from 3rd to 8th graders) have recorded the highest percentage of top level (level 4) on English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics tests citywide from 2013 to 2015. The boroughwide results are similar -- Asian students in Queens and Brooklyn have outperformed students of other demographics in most categories.³⁴ SAT score records show Asian students have achieved the 2nd highest average scores in Critical Reading and Writing next to white students, and scored the highest average in Math exams.³⁵ Most of the interviewees also went to prestigious schools such as Cornell University, Fordham,

³⁴ “English Language Arts & Math Results Summary.” *NYC Department of Education*. NYC Department of Education, n.d. web. 5 April 2016. (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/TestResults/ELAandMathTestResults>)

³⁵ “NYC AP, SAT & PSAT Results 2015.” *NYC Department of Education*. NYC Department of Education, n.d. pdf. 5 April 2016. (<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/F999C126-1BB7-4B93-93ED-BD5B6E3A849C/0/CollegeBoard2015ResultsWebsite.pdf>)

and medical school. In other words, a number of young ANNYs, including the interviewees, value the virtue of hard work, but have been able to adapt a hip-hop/street persona as a social tool. In this respect, it seems plausible to say that the new hip-hop/street persona of young ANNYs is the result of hybridization between their desire for “acceptance” through assimilation to mainstream culture and their parents’ inclination to “security” via conventional meritocracy.

The mis/underrepresentation of Asians and Asian Americans in American popular media is the consequence of other Americans’ misconstrued portrayals of Asian Americans and the first generation Asian parents’ propensity to peripheralize the entertainment industry, overstressing the stability of high income jobs. Subsequently, these phenomena have resulted in the absence of original or unique Asian personas in the media for which the Asian American youth could strive. For this reason, 2nd and 3rd generation Asian Americans cannot help but assimilate to existing third-party personas created by “other” Americans, as the case of young ANNYs adapting African Americans’ hip-hop/street persona.

Conclusion

Considering the ways in which Asian Americans are degraded in the world of popular media and neglected in the consumer market, an appropriate reaction must be formed in order to improve and disrupt the status quo. While the hybrid personas that young Asian native New Yorkers have adapted creates a rift in the societal expectation of Asian Americans, assimilating is not the ideal solution to this larger problem. As third and fourth generation Asian Americans pursue a place in the creative and entertainment worlds, they also have to secure an independent stage in which they can represent themselves freely without society trying to pigeonhole them into stereotypical representation. Only then can Asian Americans begin to form an identity

unique to them to break down the walls that inhibit them, creating a persona for young Asian Americans to adopt.

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